

Polly of the Circus

BY MARGARET MAYO

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(Continued.)

Synopsis Chapter I—Polly, a child of the circus, is brought up by Toby, a clown, and by a boss canvasman called "Muvver Jim." She learns to ride Bingo, a circus horse, and grows to womanhood knowing no life except that of the circus.

Chapter II—A church near the circus lot interests Polly. Jim reproves her for her reckless riding.

Chapter III—Polly urges Bingo to unprecedented speed and falls. Toby and Jim carry the injured girl to the parsonage nearby.

Chapter IV—The Rev. John Douglas, much to Deacon Elverson's disgust, takes Polly into the parsonage. Toby and "Muvver Jim" are received kindly by Douglas, who has placed Polly in charge of his colored servant, Mandy. Douglas promises to care for the girl until she is well.

Chapter V—When Polly becomes conscious she declares that she must rejoin the circus at once. "Are you a sky pilot?" she asks the minister. Her mother was killed riding a circus horse, and her father "got his'n in a lion's cage." The minister reads to her about Ruth and Naomi, and Polly says "I guess I'd like to hear you spiel."

Chapter VI—Douglas offends Deacon Strong by defending boys who play baseball on Sunday.

Chapter VII—Polly recovers her health, but is saddened by the death of Toby. Jim sends the news and promises to keep in touch with her.

Chapter VIII—Polly recovers from the blow death her by Toby's death. She has ceased using slang and is educating herself under Douglas' guidance. She endeavors to improve Mandy's grammar.

Chapter IX—Deacons Strong and Elverson reprove the pastor for harboring the circus girl. Douglas declares that he is merely doing his duty. Strong declares that the girl must go. Douglas defies him.

Chapter X—Douglas suggests to Polly that she go to a seminary. Her quotation "And Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave thee,'" reveals to both the fact that they love each other. Douglas takes her in his arms and tells her that she is never to leave him.

Chapter XI—"Muvver Jim" calls and notes the change in Polly's speech. Polly tells him she has abandoned the circus business. Deacons Strong and Elverson inform Polly that she can save the minister trouble by returning to the circus. Learning that the deacons contemplate discharging Douglas, she rebuffs Douglas, declares that she yearns for the circus and rushes away sobbing.

Chapter XII—Douglas is very unhappy. A month passes, and the circus plays a return engagement. Hasty, Mandy's husband, ascertains that Polly is not riding. Douglas believes she is ill and starts for the circus.

Chapter XIII—Barker, manager of the show, reproves Jim because Polly will not ride in the minister's town. Polly admits to Jim that she loves the minister, but declares that he does not love her. She makes Jim promise to keep her secret.

She started toward the ring. Eloise and Barbarian were already waiting at the entrance.

"Eloise!" She took one step toward her, then stopped at the sound of Barker's voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he called, "although we are obliged to announce that our star rider, Miss Polly, will not appear tonight, we offer you in her place an able substitute, Miss Eloise, on her black, untamed horse Barbarian."

Eloise put her hands on the horse's back to mount.

"No, no!" cried Polly.

The other girl turned in astonishment at the agony in her voice.

"Polly!"

"Wait, Eloise! I'm going to ride!"

"You can't, not Barbarian! He don't know your turn."

"So much the better!" She seized the bridle from the frightened girl's hand,

"Polly!" shouted Douglas. He had followed her to the entrance.

"I must! I will!" She flew into the ring before he could stop her. He took one step to follow her.

"You'd better let her alone and get out of here," said Strong. His voice was like a firebrand to Douglas. He turned upon him, white with rage.

"You drove her to this." His fists were clenched. He drew back to strike. Jim came from behind the wagons just in time to catch the uplifted arm.

"Leave him to me. This ain't no parson's job." The pastor lowered his arm, but kept his threatening eyes on the deacon's face.

"Where's Polly?" asked Jim.

"In there!" Douglas pointed toward the main tent without turning his head. He was still glaring at the deacon and breathing hard.

ing with an effort. One, two, three hoops were passed. She threw herself across the back of the horse and hung head downward as he galloped around the ring. The band was playing loudly; the people were cheering. She rose to meet the last two hoops.

"She's swayin'!" Jim shrieked in agony. "She's goin' to fall!" He covered his face with his hands.

Polly reeled and fell at the horse's side. She mounted and fell again. She rose and staggered in pursuit.

"I can't bear it!" groaned Douglas. He rushed into the ring, unconscious of the thousands of eyes bent upon his black ministerial garb, and caught the

slip of a girl in his arms just as she was about to sink fainting beneath the horse's hoofs.

Barker brought the performance to a halt with a crack of his whip. The



CAUGHT THE SLIP OF A GIRL IN HIS ARMS JUST AS SHE WAS ABOUT TO SINK FAINTING BENEATH THE HORSE'S HOOF.

"What!" cried Jim in alarm. He faced about and saw Eloise. He guessed the truth. A few quick strides brought him to the entrance curtains. He threw them back and looked into the ring.

"My God! Why don't Barker stop her?"

"What is it?" called Douglas. He forgot the deacon in his terror at Jim's behavior, and Strong was able to slip away unnoticed.

"She's goin' to ride! She's goin' to ride Barbarian!"

Douglas crossed to his side and looked.

Polly was springing on to the back of Barbarian. He was a poorly trained horse, used by the other girl for more showy but less dangerous feats than Polly's.

"She's goin' through her regular turn with him. She's trying to break her neck," said Jim. "She wants to do it. It's your fault!" he cried, turning upon Douglas with bloodshot eyes. He was half insane. He cared little whom he wounded.

"Why can't we stop her?" cried Douglas, unable to endure the strain. He took one step inside the entrance.

"No, no; not that!" Jim dragged him back roughly. "If she sees you now it will be the end." They watched in silence. "She's over the first part," Jim whispered at last.

Douglas drew back, his muscles tense, as he watched the scene inside the ring. Eloise stood at the pastor's side horror stricken at Polly's reckless behavior. She knew Barbarian. It was easy to guess the end.

"She's comin' to the hoops," Jim whispered hoarsely.

"Barbarian don't know that part. I never trained him," the other girl said.

Polly made the first leap toward the hoops. The horse was not at fault; it was Polly. She plunged wildly. The audience started. She caught her foot-



"If aught but death part thee and me."

the parson. A thrill shot through his veins.

"It was no use, was it?" She shook her head, with a sad little smile. He knew that she was thinking of her failure to get out of his way.

"That's because I need you so much, Polly, that God won't let you go away from me." He drew her nearer to him, and the warm blood that shot to her cheeks brought back her strength. She rose unsteadily and looked about her. Jim came toward her, white and trembling.

"All right, Polly?"

"Oh, Muvver Jim!" She threw herself into his arms and clung to him, sobbing weakly.

No one could ever remember just how the audience left the big top that night, and even Barker had no clear idea of how Jim took down the tents, loaded the great wagons and sent the caravan on its way.

When the last wagon was beginning to climb the long, winding road of the moonlit hill Jim turned to Polly, who stood near the side of the deserted ring. His eyes traveled from her to the parson, who waited near her. She was in her street clothes now, the little brown Quakerish dress which she had chosen to wear so much since her return from the parsonage.

"I guess I won't be makin' no mistake this time," he said, and he placed her hand in that of the parson.

"Goodby, Muvver Jim," faltered Polly.

He stooped and touched her forehead with his lips. A mother's spirit breathed through his kiss.

"I'm glad it's like this," he said, then turned away and followed the long, dotted line of winding lights disappearing slowly over the hill.

Her eyes traveled after him. Douglas touched the cold little hand at her side.

"I belong with them," she said, still gazing after Jim and the wagons.

"You belong with me," he answered in a firm, grave voice, and something in the deep, sure tones told her that he was speaking the truth. She lifted one trembling hand to his shoulder and looked up into his face.

"Whither thou goest will I go; where thou diest will I die."

He drew her into his arms.

"The Lord do so to me and more also if aught but death part thee and me."

THE END.

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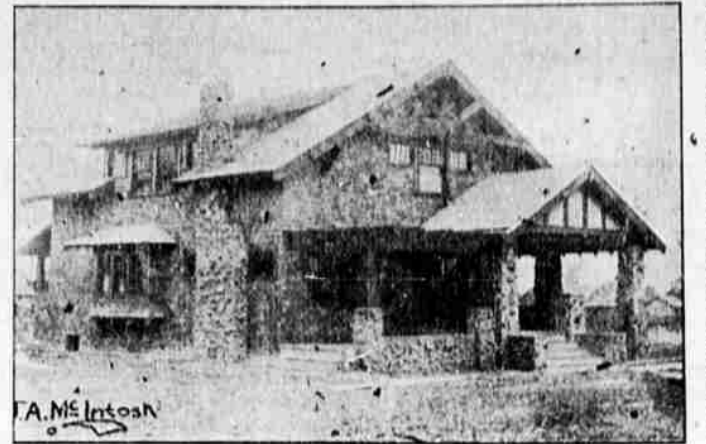
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